

Sight Beyond Borders: The Inspiring Saga of FIMA Save Vision

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Abstract

The FIMA Save Vision (FSV) program, initiated in response to the Darfur crisis in 2004, has evolved into a global effort to combat preventable blindness. Led by renowned ophthalmologists, the program has established eye care facilities and conducted training workshops across Africa and Asia. Notable achievements include the creation of eye hospitals in Sudan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somaliland, as well as the implementation of training programs for local medical personnel. The program has significantly improved access to eye care, reduced cataract surgery waiting times, and trained numerous eye specialists, thereby enhancing healthcare infrastructure in underserved regions. FIMA Save Vision's efforts have been recognized with prestigious awards and have inspired additional initiatives under the FIMA umbrella, demonstrating the transformative power of international collaboration in addressing public health challenges.

Background

The Darfur crisis of 2004 marked a pivotal moment for global medical outreach, catalyzing the launch of the FIMA Save Vision (FSV) program. During this crisis, Dr. Aly Mishal, then president of the Federation of Islamic Medical Associations (FIMA), held a crucial meeting with the Sudanese government. When asked how FIMA could assist with medical relief, the President of Sudan emphasized the dire need for ophthalmologists, saying: 'Ophthalmologists! Ophthalmologists!! and Ophthalmologists'. At that time, the crisis-affected region of Darfur was divided into three areas:

Darfur North (Al-fashir): Population of 2 million, only one eye surgeon.

Darfur South (Nyala): Population of 2 million, only one eye surgeon.

Darfur West (Genina): Population of 2 million, no eye surgeon.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, Dr. Mishal conferred with Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman, then General Secretary of FIMA, and together they launched an initiative to alleviate the suffering caused by visual impairment in these conflict-ridden regions.

Leadership from Inception to Present

Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman: Founding Director FSV (2006-2012)

Dr. Intizar Hussain: Director FSV (2013-2016)

Dr. Misbahul Aziz: Director FSV (2016-present)

First Steps in Darfur

In January 2005, the first free eye care camp was set up in Alfashir, North Darfur. Led by Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman and Dr. Imran Azam Butt, the team successfully performed 250 cataract surgeries. After a couple of weeks another eye camp of 250 eye surgeries was conducted in Alfashir, North Darfur.

Expanding Reach: Genena and Beyond

Encouraged by the results of the first two camps, a third camp was organized two months later, supported by the Government of Sudan in collaboration with PIMA, SIMA, Alkhidmat, and FIMA in Genena, West Darfur, a region with no prior history of eye surgery and not a single inch of metallic road connections. The local airport had carcasses of crashed planes. The power supply was only through generators.

Here, the team conducted 500 cataract surgeries. Seeing the backlog of cataract, another camp of 1005 cataract surgeries was done in the same area after few months. At the end of this second camp 1000 patients were still awaiting treatment to which Sudanese government responded by requesting the visiting team to stay longer. This led to the establishment of first FIMA Eye hospital in Genena.

Formation of FIMA Save Vision

In 2006, parallel eye camps were conducted in Gadarif and Kasala, Sudan, which marked a significant milestone in the field of eye care in Africa. During this camp, a team of doctors from five different countries Pakistan, South Africa, Jordan, Egypt, and Bangladesh came together to perform a total of 1,000 cataract surgeries.

This collaborative effort was instrumental in formalizing the FIMA Save Vision program an initiative aimed at addressing the widespread issue of cataract-induced blindness in the region. Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman (Ex- Gen Secretary FIMA) of the Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) was the founding director of the FIMA Save Vision program

FIMA Save Vision: Objectives

The primary objectives of the FIMA Save Vision program are to:

1. Reducing the backlog of cataract by doing eye surgeries through regular eye camps.
2. Establishing indigenous facilities with appropriate equipment
3. Capacity building by training of local human resource for continuous service delivery

Decreasing backlog of cataract surgery:

Following successful implementation of the initial eye camps in Alfashir, Genena, Gadarif and Kasla, the FIMA Save Vision program garnered significant support and sponsorships from the Sudanese government. This support enabled the expansion of the program, leading to dozens of additional eye camps across Sudan.

Expanding Global Reach

The FIMA Save Vision team extended its reach beyond Sudan, establishing multiple cataract surgery camps in various countries across Africa and Asia:

- **Africa:** Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Niger, Somaliland, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Cameroon, Morocco, South Africa, Chad, Zimbabwe.
- **Asia:** Gaza (Palestine), Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria.

Until now FIMA Save vision has conducted more than 950 eye camps in 22 countries. Around twenty-one hundred thousand (2.1 million) patients were examined in the OPD of these camps and more than three hundred and fifty thousand patients under-went free of cost cataract surgery with intraocular lens implantation.

Outpatient	2.1 million
Surgeries	>350,000
Countries	22
Eye Camps	>950
Students eye Screening	70,000 students in >200 schools

Brief Statistics of free eye camps

Glimpses of few camps:



Burkina Fasso



Nigeria



Gambia



Cameroon



Chad

IMA's Actively involved in Prevention of Blindness in Africa and other Places

- Prevention of Blindness Trust (POB) Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA)
- SIMA (Sudanese Islamic Medical Association)
- Doctors Worldwide Turkey
- Islamic Medical Association of Zimbabwe
- Islamic Medical Association of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Islamic Medical Association of South Africa
- Islamic Medical Association of Somalia
- Horn of Africa Save Vision (Somaliland & Somalia)
- Islamic Medical Association of Nigeria
- Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia
- Islamic Medical Association of Indonesia
- Serendib Foundation of Sri Lanka

Partner organizations other than IMA's:

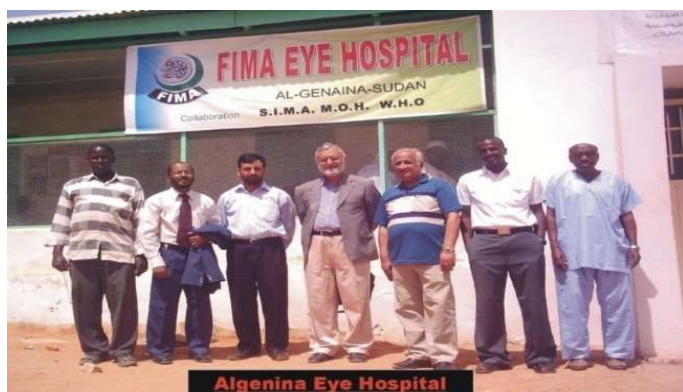
- WAMY (World Assembly of Muslim Youth)
- IICO – KSA
- WHO-EMRO
- MOH Sudan
- Arab Medical Union
- Manhal Charitable Organization
- Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation

Establishing indigenous facilities with appropriate equipment

FIMA Eye Hospital Genina – Sudan

The first eye hospital by FIMA Save Vision was established in Genina, Sudan. The government renovated

an old school building into a hospital and provided paramedical staff. The eye care equipment was sent from Pakistan, donated by PIMA. As there was no local consultant available in the region, Dr. Usman Saeed, a consultant ophthalmologist from Pakistan, stayed for two months to provide eye care and train a local doctor. According to the latest report from this hospital, more than 10,000 cataract surgeries have been performed there.



Dr. Hafeezur Rahman, Dr Intzar Hussain, Dr. Azhar Qazi with the local doctors at the inauguration of first FIMA Eye Hospital in Genena-Sudan

FIMA Eye Care Centre Puttalam - Sri Lanka

The FIMA Eye Care Centre in Puttalam, Sri Lanka, was established in 2008 to address the region's need for specialized eye care services. Staffed by experienced ophthalmologists and healthcare professionals, the centre is dedicated to providing high-quality, compassionate care. Known for its community outreach programs, the FIMA Eye Care Centre plays a vital role in enhancing eye health and vision for the local population. Thousands of cataract and other ocular surgeries have been performed to date.



FIMA Eye Care Centre Putlam- Sri Lanka

FIMA-POB Eye Centre in PMC – Peshawar, Pakistan

FIMA and POB designated the ophthalmology department of Kuwait Teaching Hospital, a relief hospital affiliated with Peshawar Medical College, as its regional center by sponsoring cataract surgeries for poor patients. Thousands of cataract surgeries have been performed at this center.



POB Hospitals in other cities of Pakistan

Inspired by the success of the FIMA Save Vision program, where the majority of ophthalmologists providing voluntary services were from Pakistan, a similar trust was established in Pakistan called the POB Trust (Prevention of Blindness Trust). POB Trust, a project of PIMA (a member IMA of FIMA), is chaired by Dr. Misbahul Aziz (Director FSV). Apart from participating in relief activities and conducting free eye camps nationally and internationally in collaboration with FIMA Save Vision, this trust has established four state-of-the-art eye hospitals in Karachi and one in Lahore. These hospitals provide free eye care services.

POB Eye Hospital in Karachi offers services in all ophthalmology subspecialties, including Vitreo-Retina, Glaucoma, Oculoplastic, etc. It is also recognized by the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP) for a four-year fellowship training in Ophthalmology.



One of the POB Eye Hospitals in Karachi

Vitreo-Retina and Oculoplastic Eye Surgical Unit in Kabul – Afghanistan

Afghanistan lacked a single vitreo-retinal surgical setup, forcing patients needing retinal surgeries to travel to Pakistan or India, incurring significant expenses. Due to its proximity to the Afghan border, the FIMA/POB Eye Centre at Peshawar Medical College frequently received many of these patients, offering surgeries at subsidized rates or free of cost. However, travel expenses still burdened the patients, and many could not afford them.

To address this issue, Afghanistan's first-ever vitreo-retinal surgical unit was established in 2022 at Al-Noor Eye Hospital in Kabul. POB Trust and Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan sponsored this project by providing the unit with the latest surgical microscope, phaco machine, vitrectomy, and laser machines.



Vitreo-Retina and Oculoplastic Eye Surgical Unit. Kabul Afghanistan

Advanced Ophthalmic Surgical Training Centre Hargeisa – Somaliland

Somalia and Somaliland similarly lacked a vitreo-retinal surgical setup, forcing patients to travel to neighboring countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, or as far as India, which involved significant expenses. To address this issue, an advanced ophthalmic surgical training center was established in 2023. A surgical microscope compatible with retinal surgery was purchased from Pakistan, and a phaco-vitrectomy machine was acquired from Switzerland through a Turkish vendor. Both machines were installed at Manhal Specialty Hospital in Hargeisa. To date, two Phaco Training and Oculoplastic surgical camps have been organized, where local eye specialists were trained in microsurgical techniques by visiting consultants from Pakistan.



Capacity building of local human resource for continuous service delivery:

Postgraduate Diploma and Masters in Ophthalmology Program at Hargeisa, Somaliland

In 2006, Somalia had only 3-4 eye surgeons for its 13 million people, severely limiting access to eye care. The first cataract surgical camp conducted by FIMA Save Vision in Mogadishu benefited around 500 patients, but it became clear that temporary camps were insufficient for long-term impact.

To address this, FIMA Save Vision, in collaboration with WHO-EMRO, MOH Somaliland, and Manhal Charitable Organization, launched an academic postgraduate program at Manhal Specialty Hospital, University of Hargeisa, in partnership with Peshawar Medical College and Riphah International University Islamabad. The first batch of six students was admitted in 2013. Dr. Aslam Bhatti, a consultant ophthalmologist from Pakistan, was appointed as a full-time professor. Regular visits by external faculty from Pakistan ensured high-quality training. The program was upgraded to master's level in 2016.

To date, 24 eye surgeons have graduated with a Diploma, and 5 surgeons have graduated from the Master's Program. They are providing ophthalmic services in various parts of Somalia and Somaliland. Inspired by their trainers' teachings, they also conduct free eye camps throughout the country and other regions of Africa under the Horn of Africa Save Vision initiative. This has led to a significant improvement in ophthalmological services across Somalia, Somaliland, and the Horn of Africa.

Phaco, Vitreo-Retinal, and Oculoplastic Training Program, Hargeisa – Somaliland

Keeping the significant impact of the Diploma and Masters in Ophthalmology program on the eye care services of Somalia and Somaliland in mind, Alkhidmat

Foundation sponsored the equipment for establishing the Advanced Ophthalmic Surgical Training Centre at Manhal Specialty Hospital, Hargeisa. Three Oculoplastic and Phaco surgical training camps were organized in 2023, two in Somaliland and one in Somalia.



Professor Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman
Director FIMA Save Vision Program

Hussein Gezairy, M.D., F.R.C.S
Regional Director, WHO/EMRO



Dr. Hafeezur Rahman, Dr MUzman and Dr Aslam Bhatti (Resident Faculty) with the graduates of DO-4th batch



Dr. Misbahul Aziz addressing the launching ceremony of Master's Program



Dr. Hafeezur Rahman and Dr Intzar Hussain with the students and resident Faculty



Dr. MisbahulAziz(Current Director FSV)at the graduation ceremony of second batch



Dr. Ahmed Noor and Dr. Mahmoud Shiine graduates of MS Batch-1 receiving their Degrees from President of Somaliland



Dr. Idrees and Dr. Usman with the trainee doctors Somaliland

Dr. Idrees and Dr. Usman with the trainee doctors in Somalia

Workshops for Doctors and Paramedics

Since its inception, FIMA Save Vision, in collaboration with member IMAs, has conducted multiple workshops in Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Gaza. A short summary of a selected few is mentioned below:



- **Workshop on Oculoplastic at Khartoum and Genina:** The first workshop was conducted in December 2006. Prof. Dr. Imran Akram Sahaf and Dr. Intizar Hussain trained local eye specialists in diagnosing and managing a variety of difficult oculoplastic cases.
- **Workshop for Doctors at Lagos and Katsina - Nigeria, June 2008**
- **Workshop for Paramedics in Lagos and Katsina**
- **Corneal Transplant Workshop in Sudan:** A workshop and free corneal transplant eye camp was conducted in Sudan. Ten donor corneas were provided from Sri Lanka through the help of Mr. Rafiq, the administrator of Kuwait Hospital Puttalam,

in collaboration with the Serendib Foundation. Prof. Dr. Abdul Haye and Dr. Intizar Hussain trained local doctors in two types of transplant procedures: penetrating keratoplasty and DALK (deep anterior lamellar keratoplasty).

- **Workshop for Eye Surgeons in Oculoplastic and Vitreo-Retinal Surgeries - Gaza:** A training workshop for local eye surgeons in Gaza was conducted in February 2013. They were trained in vitreo-retina and oculoplastic surgeries by Dr. Imran Ghayyoor (vitreo-retinal consultant), Dr. Imran Akram
- **Phaco Training Workshop for Foreign Eye Specialists in Pakistan:** A hands-on training workshop was conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, where eye specialists from Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Palestine were trained in phacoemulsification surgery for cataract removal.
- **Multiple Training Workshops for Local Eye Specialists and Paramedics in Pakistan:** 23 workshops have been conducted for doctors and paramedics to date, with 356 participants.

Glimpses of Few workshops/Training sessions:



Workshop for doctors at Lagos and Katsina- Nigeria June 2008



Workshop for doctors at Lagos and Katsina- Nigeria June 2008



Workshop for Paramedics Lagos and Katsina:



Workshop for Paramedics Lagos and Katsina:



Training workshop for Paramedics, Malakal-Sudan October 2008



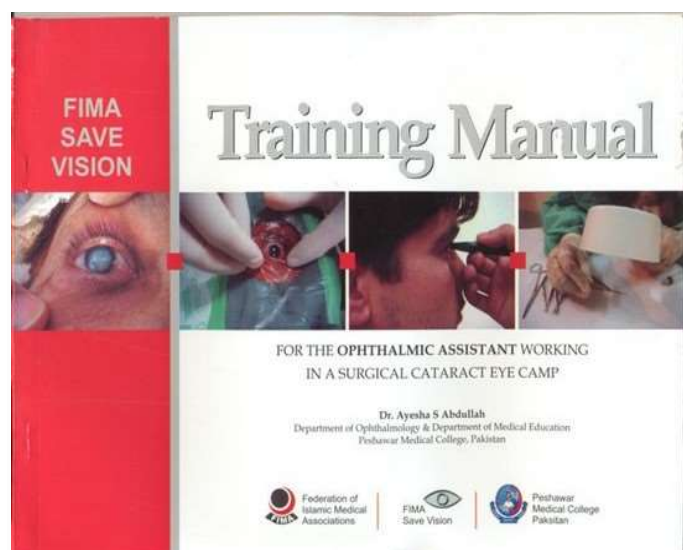
Phaco-training Afghanistan

Vitreo-Retinal, Oculoplastic and phaco Training program, Kabul- Afghanistan

A series of three eye camps were organized in 2022 and 2023 to train local eye specialists in retinal and oculoplastic surgeries. These camps also offered free cataract, vitreo-retinal, oculoplastic and corneal transplant surgeries

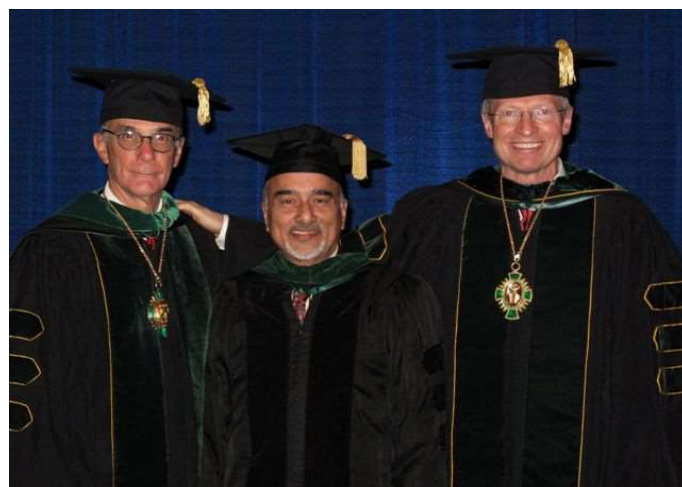
Corneal transplant	12
Cataract surgeries	1170
Oculoplastic surgeries	88
Vitreo-Retina Surgery	56
Total OPD Screening	>10000

Statistics of three training workshop and surgical camps in Kabul Afghanistan



Training Manual for Paramedics

One eye specialist from Afghanistan was then enrolled in a training program at Peshawar medical college and he was trained in Vitreo-retinal and Corneal transplant surgery for one year. Now after training, he is providing eye-care services in Afghanistan.

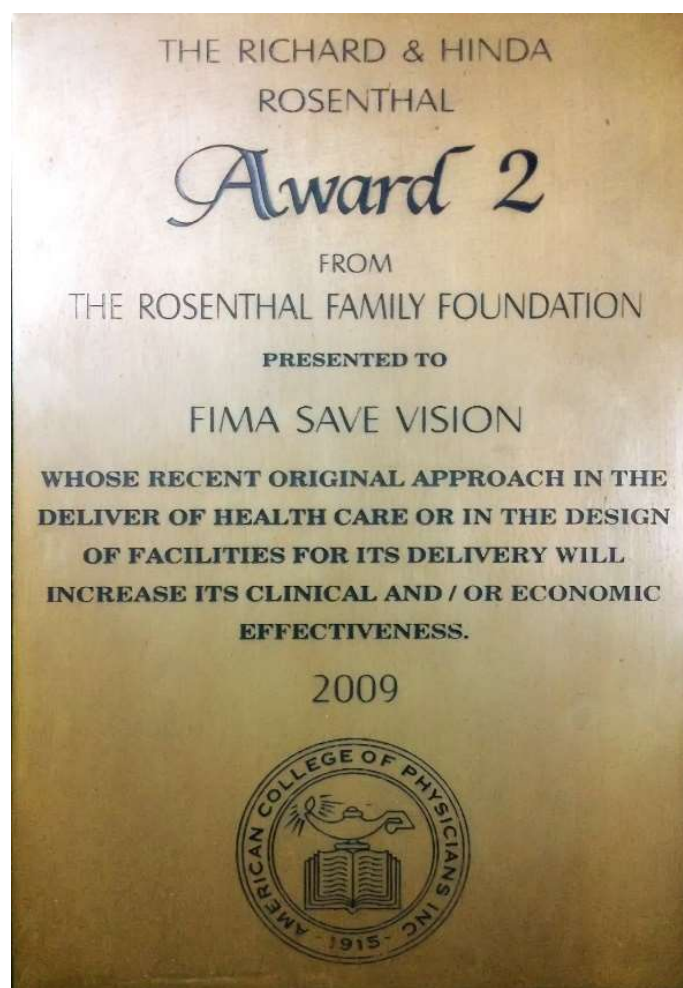


Dr. Parvaiz Malik (President FIMA) with Dr. Jeffrey Harris (President American College of Physicians) to receive The Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award at the convocation of American College of Physicians 2009

Awards and Recognition

Recognizing the significant impact of the FIMA Save Vision program in eye healthcare, it has received several prestigious awards:

1. **The Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award - 2009:** Presented at the annual convention of the American College of Physicians, this award honors exceptional innovation and effectiveness in healthcare.
2. **FIMA Lifetime Achievement Award:** Dr. Hafeez Ur Rahman and Dr. Adnan Jaljuli were awarded the FIMA Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of their services to FIMA and FIMA Save Vision.
3. **APAO Award:** The Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology presented this award to Dr. Intizar Hussain in recognition of his services in preventing blindness in the Asia-Pacific region through FIMA Save Vision and POB Trust.
4. **OSP Gold Medal:** The Ophthalmological Society of Pakistan presented this gold medal to Dr. Intizar Hussain in recognition of his services in preventing blindness through FIMA Save Vision and POB Trust.
5. **Nimatullah Khan Lifetime Achievement Award:** Dr. Intizar Hussain received this award in 2019, and Dr. Misbahul Aziz received it in 2023.



The Richard & Hinda Rosenthal Award



FIMA Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr Hafeezur Rahman



Dr. Misbahul Aziz Receiving 'Nimatullah Khan Life time achievement award'



Dr. Intzar Hussain Receiving 'Nimatullah Khan Life time achievement award'

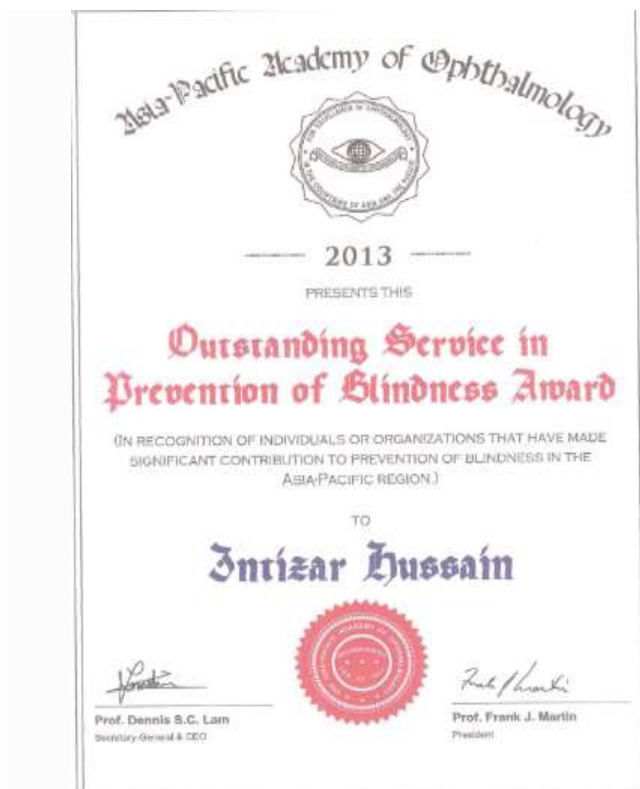
Impact to Date

Example of Regional Impact: Somalia & Somaliland

Indicator	2013	2021
Population	13 Million	16 Million
Region Access	2	10
Qualified Doctors	3	32
Cataract Surgery Rate	230/Million/Year	1200/millon/year
Cataract Surgery Waiting time	>2 Years	<2months

Impact of training Program in Somalia/Somaliland

Like Somalia/Somaliland, FSV program had a significant impact in eye care services in various parts of Africa and Asia specially by decreasing the backlog of preventable



Asia-Pacific academy of Ophthalmology award

blindness by doing more than 350,000 cataract surgeries. Establishing sustainable eye care centres and training eye specialists and paramedics

Conclusion

FIMA Save Vision's history is a testament to the power of collaboration and dedication in addressing global health crises. From its origins in Darfur to expanding across Africa and Asia, the program continues to restore sight and hope to thousands, embodying the true spirit of humanitarian aid.

The FIMA Save Vision program represents a remarkable collaborative effort among the member Islamic Medical Associations (IMAs) of the Federation of Islamic

Medical Associations (FIMA). By coming together under a unified umbrella, these organizations have successfully pooled their resources, expertise, and dedication to work towards a common goal: the eradication of preventable blindness through comprehensive eye care initiatives.

This collective endeavour has led to outstanding results, demonstrating the power of international cooperation in addressing significant public health challenges.

Success story of FSV was instrumental to start other programs like FIMA Save Smile, Fima Save Dignity, Fima Save Heart and so on under the umbrella of FIMA.